



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

PHILIPPINES

SUCCESS STORY

Maasim town mayor addresses poverty by making bare forest lands productive

Once unproductive lands are now being turned to pineapple plantations, providing local communities with livelihoods



USAID/Philippines

Once unproductive lands are now being turned to pineapple plantations, providing local communities with livelihoods. Mayor Lopez of Maasim (right photo) surveys fields that Dole Philippines recently planted with pineapples.

Mayor Aniceto P. Lopez Jr. of Maasim, Sarangani Province in Southern Mindanao had a dream: he wanted his people to become economically productive and lead peaceful lives. In only his second term as mayor, Mayor Lopez is beginning to realize his dream, and along with it the dreams of many of his people.

"I really can't believe that it is already happening," he said. "Every time I come here (pineapple plantations), I am always amazed at the rate of development taking place."

Maasim comprises 46,600 hectares of forest lands, but only 2,000 hectares still have forest cover remaining. The former pasture lands are also in the heart of a war zone, where government soldiers and members of the New People's Army (NPA) have clashed regularly over the years. But the economic and social situation in Maasim has improved in recent years. Mayor Lopez leveraged Maasim's Forest Land Use Plan (FLUP) to successfully court the private sector – most notably, Dole Philippines – to invest in the municipality. USAID's Environmental Governance (EcoGov) Project supported the development of the FLUP, which boosted the confidence of Maasim officials in their ability to manage the community's natural resources in a profitable and sustainable manner. The FLUP also reassured private sector investors, such as Dole Philippines, who were encouraged by Maasim's proactive efforts to manage its forest lands.

EcoGov, implemented with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and other partners, has been helping local governments throughout the Philippines develop FLUPs that will guide the varied use of forest lands and the process of land allocation. With its FLUP developed, Maasim was able to identify priority sectors for private sector investment and then approach investors to seek financing.

Mayor Lopez said that gradual improvements in the peace-and-order situation in Maasim were also critical in attracting private investors, which in turn helped further diffuse tensions in and around the community. The mayor knows a number of NPA commanders in the area. He talked to them about the economic opportunities that outside investments could offer and persuaded many NPA members to lay down their arms. "I told them I would work hard to alleviate their economic situation," the mayor said. Mayor Lopez estimated that Dole Philippines has put in around P100 million worth of investments in the area, covering about 700 hectares. To date, 200 households have benefited from his efforts – a number of them comprising former NPA rebels or supporters.

Mayor Lopez stressed that Maasim's FLUP will not lead to the overdevelopment of the community's natural resources. "It will be a balanced development; we will take care of our people but we will also make sure that we will not degrade our resources. Our upland farmers should understand that as they get more from the land, they should also invest in it so that they would continue reaping the benefits."